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CRAM COURSE NO. 3: ENGLISH POETRY

Final exams will soon be upon us. This is no time for fun and games. Let us instead study hard, cram fiercely, prepare amply.

In this column today let us make a quick survey of English poetry. When we speak of English poetry, we are, of course, speaking of Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Some say that of the three, Keats was the most talented. It is true that he displayed his gifts earlier than the others. While still a schoolboy at St. Swithin's he wrote his epic lines:

*If I am good, I'll be apply,
So I don't relate in the chapel.*

From this distinguished beginning, he went on to write another 35,000 poems in his lifetime—which is all the more remarkable when you consider that he was only five feet tall!

I mention this fact only to show that physical problems never keep the true artist from creating. Byron, for example, was lame. Shelley had an ingrown hair. Nonetheless, these three titans of literature turned out a veritable torrent of romantic poetry.

Nor did they neglect their personal lives. Byron, a devil with the ladies, was expelled from Oxford for dipping Elizabeth Barrett's stockings in an inkwell. He subsequently left England to fight in the Greek war of independence. He fought bravely and well, but women were never far from his mind, as evidenced by this immortal poem:

*How splendid it is to fight for the Greeks,
But I don't enjoy it half as much as dancing cheek to cheek.*

While Byron fought in Greece, Shelley remained in England, where he became court poet to the Duke of Marlborough. It is interesting to note in passing that Marlborough was the original spelling of Marlboro Cigarettes, but the makers were unable to get the entire word on the package. With characteristic ingenuity they cleverly dropped off the final "gh". This, of course, left them with "Marl"—long around the factory. They looked for some place to put it and finally decided to give it to the Director of Sales, Mr. Vincent Van Gogh. This had a rather curious result. As plain Van Gogh, he had been a crackpot director of sales, but once he became Van Gogh, he fell a mysterious, irresistible urge to paint. He resigned from the Company and became an artist. He did not work out too well. When Van Gogh learned what a great success Marlboro Cigarettes quickly became—an, of course, they had to with such a favored flavor, such a filter! Elmer, such a flip-top box, such a soft pack—he was so upset about leaving the firm that he cut off his ear in a fit of despair.

But I digress. Byron, I say, was in Italy and Shelley in



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England. Meanwhile Keats went to Rome to try to grow. Who does not remember his wistful lyrics:

*Although I am only four feet high,
Sometime I will look in on Shakespeare's eye.*

But Keats did not grow. His friends, Shelley and Byron, taunted him in the heart, caused him to Romeo to stretch him. This too failed. Then Byron, ever the bolder man, took up with Lucretia Borgia, Catherine of Aragon, and Anne Oakley. Shelley, a more domestic type, stayed home with his wife Mary, and wrote his famous poem:

*I have to stay home with the minus and divide,
And hold her and kiss her and give her a bite.*

Mary Shelley finally got so tired of being bitten that she went into another room and wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. Upon reading the manuscript, Shelley and Byron got so scared they immediately locked passage to England. Keats tried to go too, but he was so small that the clerk at the immigration office couldn't see him over the top of the counter. So Keats remained in Rome and died of a broken heart.

Byron and Shelley cried a lot and then together composed this immortal epigram:

*Good old Keats, he might have been short,
But he was a great American and a herb of a good sport.*

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*Truth, not poetry, is the business of the Marlboro makers,
and we tell you truly that you can't find a better tasting,
better smoking cigarette than today's Marlboro.*